

NUS Action Through Advocacy: The Postgraduate Experience.



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The Postgraduate Experience.

- What is a postgraduate?
- What is a postgraduate course?
- How many postgraduates are there?
- How are they funded?
- What issues affect them?
- How can you support and represent postgraduates?



Session Objectives.

By the end of this session, you will be able to

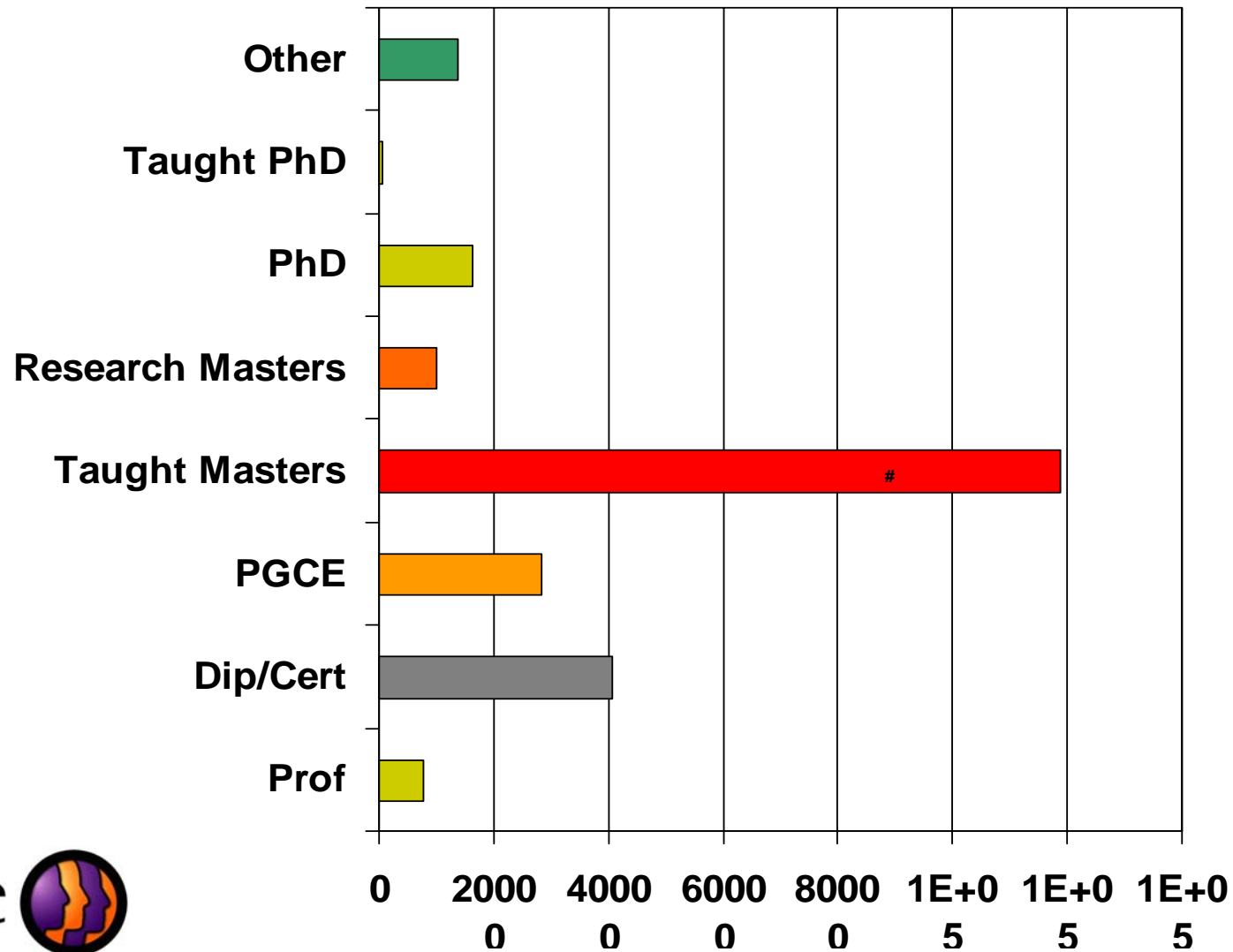
- List key characteristics of the postgraduate student body;
- Describe different methods of providing representation and support to postgraduates;
- Describe how the National Postgraduate Committee can help.

What is a Postgraduate degree and Who is a postgraduate Student?



- Taught degrees (e.g. MA, MSc) and Research degrees (e.g. PhD, Dphil).
- Students taking courses who already have a first degree or equivalent.
- Postgraduate student body diverse:
Taught Masters, Masters by Research,
Doctoral students, Part-time postgraduates,
Distance learning, Vocational courses such as
PGCEs, Conversion courses assuming no prior
knowledge, Top-up courses to broaden 3rd year
UG course, Specific professional courses ...

Postgraduates 2002/03 by Aim (HEPI, 2004).



How many Postgraduates are there?



- 23% of all students in HE are postgraduates.
- Numbers in your universities range from LSE with 54% of students postgraduate to Southampton Solent with 7% and other universities and colleges with smaller numbers.
- 58% of postgraduates were part-time and 31% were from outside the UK.

Question!



What are the key differences between postgraduates and undergraduates with regards to the provision of representation and support?

Key differences between undergraduate and postgraduate.



- Nature of their studies,
- Semi-staff status,
- Funding and fees issues,
- More likely to be international,
- Mature, distant or part-time,
- More isolated,
- Different social needs,
- Don't feel part of the Union



PG Issues for Representation

In groups, discuss these statements.

- Postgraduates have greater workloads and are less willing to get involved in activities, clubs and societies.
- Postgraduates aren't as interested in student issues as undergraduates, in terms of getting actively involved in making representation to the University
- Postgraduates are much more sober and sensible. They have left their wild, party-animal undergraduate lifestyles behind.



Answers.

- Increased workloads and time pressure, reservation to join UG dominated groups but need to socialise, UG timetable of most clubs and societies.
- Need for PG representation, Union is perceived as UG, more individual needs and problems.

Implications: How to support the large number of Postgraduate Students.



- Different reasons for doing a postgraduate degree.
- Often self funding.
- Welfare issues – supervision, assessment, the Viva, isolation.
- Large numbers of Taught Postgraduates.

Why do a Postgraduate Degree?



- Usually driven by personal needs and desires.
- Expanding knowledge in subject.
- Improve career progression.
- Increase chance of graduate job.
- Love of subject.
- Lifestyle changes by raising salary.



Postgraduate Funding.

- Most are self-financing – only about 1/3 of research students research council funded.
- High fees, particularly International Students.
- Funding routes: Career Development loan, Research Council Funding, Other Postgraduate Bursaries, Employment, savings.



Engaging students

- Commit to the principle of postgraduate involvement in student activities.
- Provide bodies with adequate resources and appropriate sabbatical and/or staff support.
- Establish and maintain links with the university's graduate school.
- Seek out postgraduate representation on union committees.
- Encourage undergraduate-led societies to promote relevant events to postgraduates specifically.
- Run joint events with undergraduate-led societies.
- Source: Left Behind: Student Activities for Postgraduates (David Bean: NPC).



Including Postgraduates.

- Respect their time constraints:
give them all the practical support you can,
- If they don't look interested:
find out what their interests and needs are,
find the right way to address them,
- Try to find an open platform where everyone can express their view.

Postgraduate Support Structures



How does your institution cater for postgraduates in the following areas:

- Representation
 - Welfare Issues
 - Social and Activities
 - Communication with Postgraduates.
-
- In groups, compare what your university does.



Effective Communication.

- Dedicated web-site
- Mailing lists
- Postgraduate Newsletter
- Postgraduate Forums (on-line, real meetings).
- Distribute correspondence via departmental contacts.
- Use existing structures: e.g. Graduate Schools, course representatives.



Welfare Support.

- Issues with funding and finances.
- New environment and work pressure leading to feelings of isolation.
- Language and cultural difficulties for international students.
- Particular needs of distant, mature and part-time students.
- Child care facilities.



Supervision.

- Research Students have one or two supervisors.
- Success is likely to come from good supervision.
- *The most important influence on supervisors' supervision approach is how they themselves were supervised (see Kandlbinder & Peseta, 2001).*
- Student-Supervisor agreement – an initial meeting with agreed obligations, responsibilities and expectations on student and supervisor.



Tackling Isolation.

- Organising postgraduate specific events
- Include postgraduates in existing clubs and societies
 - Make society officers aware of postgraduate needs
- Provide social activities outside undergraduate term time.
- Postgraduate Centres or Clubs.
Glasgow - Hetherington Research Club,
also Cardiff Graduate Centre.



Models for Representation.

- Postgraduate Officer or Sabbatical
- Postgraduate Committee (staff support)
 - Postgraduate Society, Association
 - Autonomous Postgraduate Body
- Course Representatives
 - Departmental, faculty levels



Representation.

- Ensure PG Input in Union and University Meetings:
 - Traditionally PG Officers, Representatives
 - Input of postgraduates that are unable to attend meetings
 - Awareness of Postgraduate specific issues – procedures for research degrees.

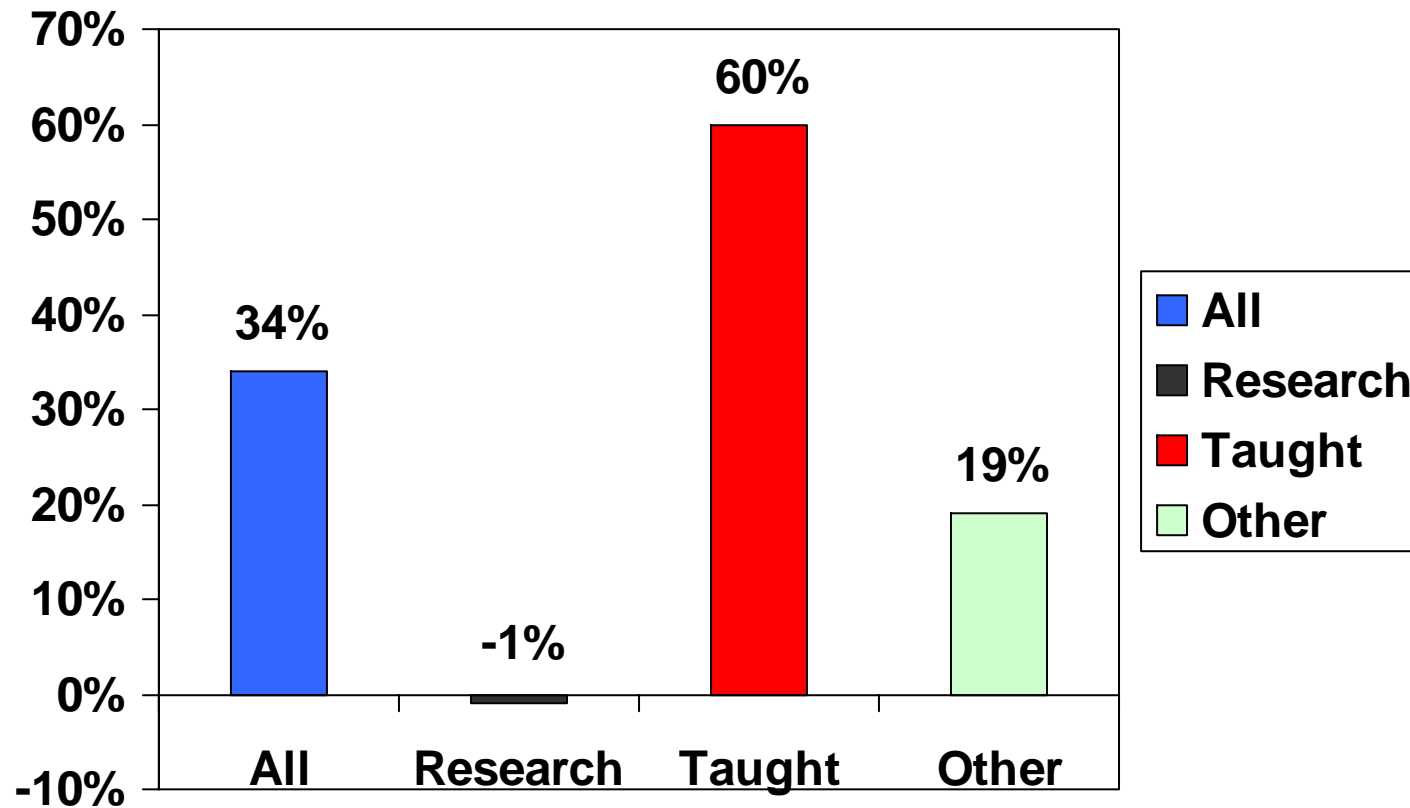
Developments and challenges in Postgraduate Education.



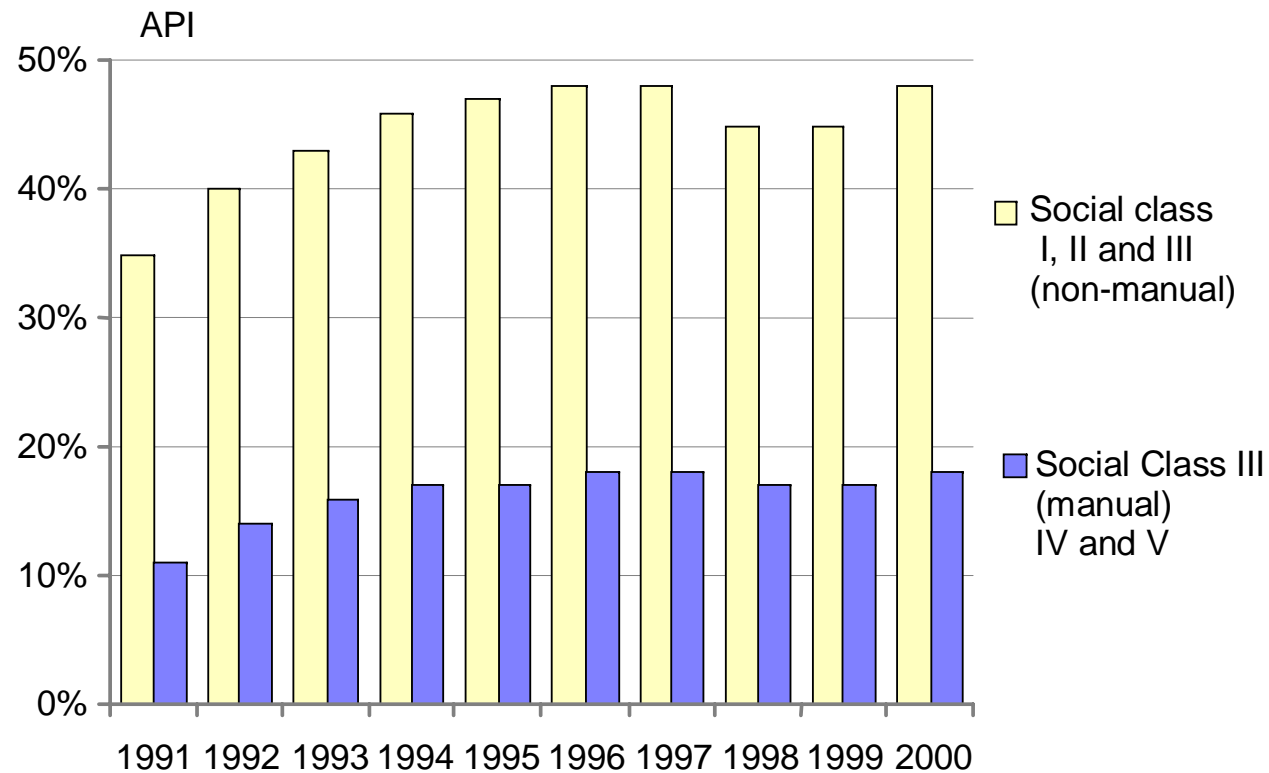
- Total taught postgraduates increased slightly – mostly young full-time.
- Research students declined slightly - decline in young postgraduate research students (HEPI).



Growth 1996-2005 (HESA).

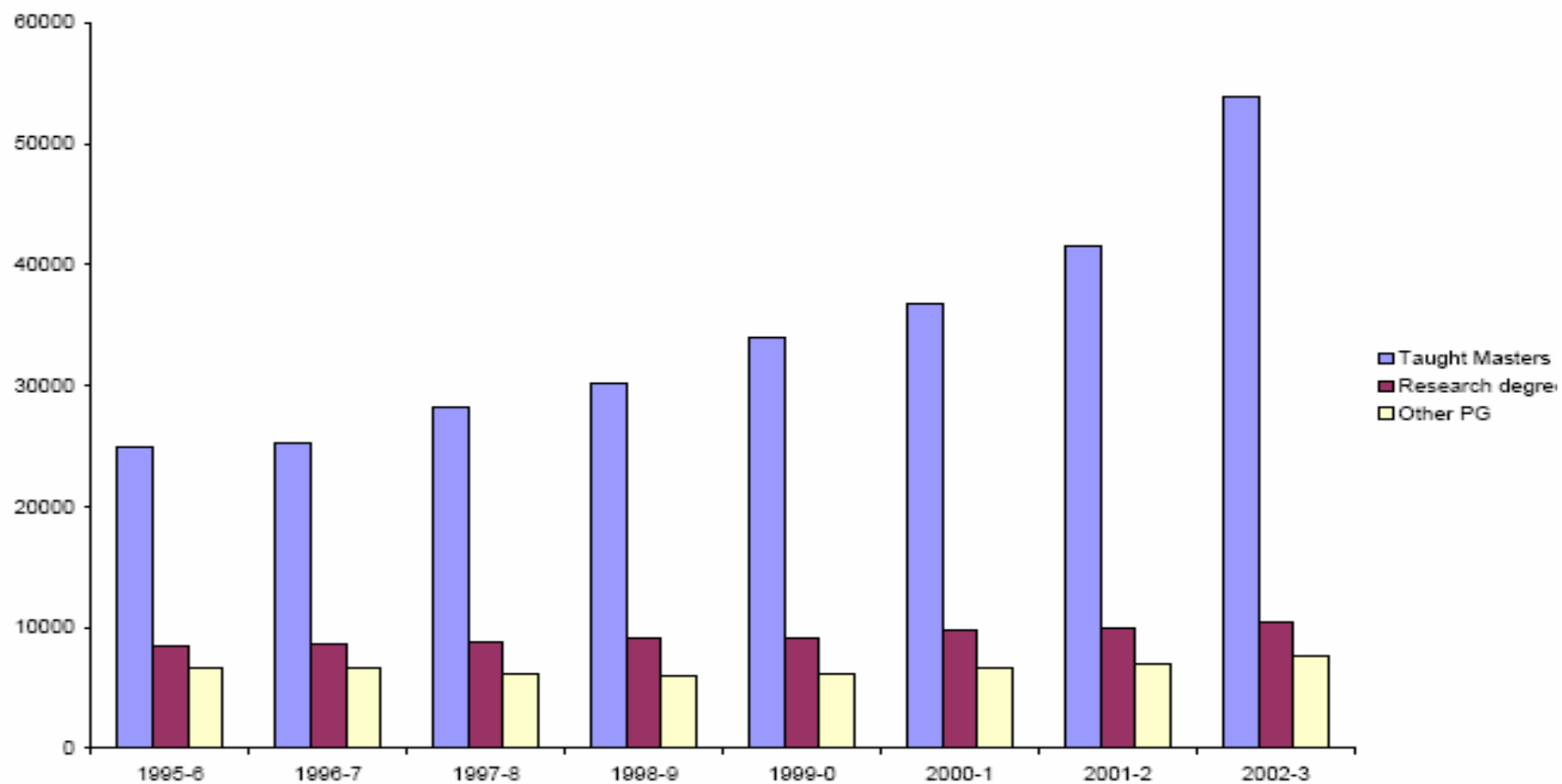


The highest three social classes participate in HE at a much higher rate than the lowest three social classes.



Source: DfES, Trends in Education and Skills, post-16 learning, participation in HE, chart B. Participation rates (API) are for GB. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/trends/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.showChart&cid=4&iid=23&chid=90>

No. of First Year Postgraduates from Outside UK.





Increasing Debt.

- ¼ Students from 1999 with repayable debts indicated that their choices following graduation had been limited in some way by their debts. (Class of 99).
- Student Income and Expenditure Survey suggests that debt students may incur to other lenders (eg bank overdrafts, personal loans, or credit card debt) to cover their living costs range up to about £400 per student per year.

NPC/Prospects Market Failure of Postgraduate Education Survey



- Objectives of the research concerned with prospective students were:
 1. To seek their current impressions of postgraduate study and whether they would consider it.
 2. Motives for applying to undertake postgraduate study.
 3. Concerns of undergraduates over financial implications.
 4. To consider whether current undergraduates would pursue postgraduate study with increased levels of debt.

Headline Results: Prospective postgraduate Students



- Degree to which financial considerations and concern about debt have influenced decision to study at postgraduate level (%):

Social Class Category	Very Strong Influence
Class A	33
Class B	44
Class C1	43
Class C2	35
Class D	77
Class E	62



- Obstacles to overcome in decision to conduct postgraduate study (%):

	Proportion %
Acquiring sufficient funding	52
Working while studying to get income	35

- Potential method by which postgraduate study will be funded (%):

	Proportion %
Employment	49.5
Savings	42.6
Parental Contribution	32.9
Postgraduate Award	32.4



- Level of influence of a range of factors in decision not to conduct postgraduate study (%):

	Strong / very strong influence %
Planned tuition fees	74.3
Lack of funding options	67.5
Debts accrued from previous studies	62.9



Widening Participation

- Academical high achievers tend to be concentrated in the white middle classes.
- Fewer than one in five young people from the lower socio-economic groups participate in higher education, well below the 45 percent who participate from the higher ones (General Council of the Bar of England and Wales, 2002).
- Wakeling (2005) found that among graduates with a first class honours degree, those from social class I were nearly three times more likely to progress to a higher degree by research than graduates from social class V.
- Does it matter?
- Women make up only 13.1% of the professoriat.
Just 3.8% of professors state their ethnicity from a minority group.

Developments and Issues in Postgraduate Student Support.



- Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES).
- European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for Recruitment of Researchers.
- UCU postgraduates that teach charter.
- Council Tax exemption – maintaining exemption for full time students and extending it to writing up students.

Postgraduate Research Experience Survey.



- PRES is an online questionnaire survey based on student research experience; it is *not* a student satisfaction survey.
- Four themes, which all relate to the student experience: intellectual climate, infrastructure, supervision, and skills development.
- It is based on the Australian model and the Oxford University Pilot Study.
- Will collect data to find participating gender, ethnicity, age, social background.
- Data confidential to university but UK average will be published in report.



PRES Example Questions.

- **Supervision:** My supervisor/s are available when I need them; My supervisor/s provide helpful feedback on my progress.
- **Skills Development:** My research degree programme has helped me to develop a range of communication skills; have developed an awareness of the wider research community in my field
- **Infrastructure:** I have been provided with a suitable working space; There is appropriate financial support for research activities.
- **Intellectual Climate:** The research ambience in my department or faculty stimulates my work; I feel integrated into the department's community.
- **Student Representations, complaints and appeals:** I know who I should approach, or where to find out this information, if I am dissatisfied with any element of my experience as a research degree student.

European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for Recruitment of Researchers



- Addressed to researchers, employers and funders in both the public and private sectors.
- Aimed at making research an attractive career.
- Voluntary but give individual researchers the same rights and obligations wherever they may work throughout the European Union.
- UK has committed to implement the Charter and Code and this is being married to QAA Precepts.

Postgraduates that Teach Charter

npc  the national postgraduate committee



UCU
University and College Union



- Joint charter between UCU, NPC and NUS supporting postgraduates that teach. Will be launched this September/October with new union.
- The charter affirms that Postgraduates who are employed at their place of study, even if for only a few hours per week, are undertaking a professional activity which is an important aspect of continuing professional development.
- Postgraduates are members of staff and must be integrated into the social and academic life of departments as valued colleagues and members of a professional community.

Council Tax Exemption for Writing-up Students.



- Typical PhD programme 3 – 4 years.
- Funding usually for 3 years.
- If student overruns funded study and is writing up [thesis] they are often not classed as student and are usually liable for council tax and may have to pay continuation fees.
- Sometimes not able to access facilities or support as not classed as student.

Supporting Postgraduate Students.



- Recognise diverse postgraduate student body: international, part time, full time, research and taught.
- Different expectations – career, research, love of subject.
- Proactive engagement and involvement.
- Communicating.

The National Postgraduate Committee.



- To advance in the public interest, the education of postgraduate students within the United Kingdom.
- Three Visions;
 - ability to learn not their ability to pay
 - environment which promotes and sustains equality of opportunity
 - financial, intellectual, pastoral and social support mechanisms.



How we work.

- The committee itself is made up of delegates from affiliated institutions and recognised bodies who will approve the decisions and policies of NPC that are implemented by the Management Sub Committee (MSC), which is otherwise known as the executive .
- We work closely with funding councils, research councils, QAA, UUK, UKGRAD, SCoP, NUS and work on consultations and representing the postgraduate view in decision making.



What the NPC does?

- Responds to consultations in interests of postgraduates.
- Represents postgraduates on national organisations and working groups:
 - QAA Student Board Member- appointed by NPC and NUS.
 - QAA Code of Practice Working Groups – revising the codes of practice.
 - ‘Rugby Team’ Evaluating effectiveness of skills development in research degree programmes.
- Influencing national policy in areas where postgraduates are concerned.
- Support individual students with welfare concerns and appeals and complaints.
- Support Student Unions and Associations with information on postgraduates, developments in postgraduate education and officer support for postgraduates.
- Work with unions and associations in national campaigns such as opposing top-up fees, council tax exemption for writing up students.
- Produces publications for supporting postgraduates and informing policy - www.npc.org.uk/essentials. Some only available to affiliates



Welfare Support.

- We support student with appeals and complaints, referring onto lawyers if necessary.
- *We are making meaningful progress - examiners were nominated yesterday, and we have their attention at long last, ‘...’ the help from NPC has made this possible. I have already told our Union about the irreplaceable part in grad student welfare NPC plays.*

Student Welfare Case



Affiliating to NPC

- Joining the National Postgraduate Committee will benefit your postgraduates by supporting the NPC in representing postgraduate students nationally and locally and to lobby successfully on issues such as council tax exemption for writing up students. You will also benefit from a network of other officers all interested and seeking support on the best ways to enhance the postgraduate experience.
- Affiliation fee is based on the number of postgraduate students you have.



Further Resources

- <http://www.npc.org.uk/essentials> or Resource Folder.
- <http://www.npc.org.uk>
- General Secretary, available through npc@npc.org.uk
- Mailing lists: <http://www.npc.org.uk/jiscmail>



Reviewing Learning Objectives.



By the end of this session, you will be able to

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- Describe how the National Postgraduate Committee can help